

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY LONDON

INFO USMISSION NATO

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

S E C R E T STATE 165174

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MT, IC

SUBJ: UK VIEWS ON KEFLAVIK BASE: ANOTHER MALTA?

1. THERE HAVE BEEN INDICATIONS THE BRITISH BELIEVE THAT THE GOI IS BLUFFING ON THE KEFLAVIK BASE QUESTION, AND THAT A GOI DECISION TO TERMINATE THE US-ICELAND DEFENSE AGREEMENT IS NOT IN THE CARDS. SUCH VIEW WOULD PRESUMABLY BE BASED ON THE NOTION THAT KEFLAVIK IS TOO VALUABLE TO ICELAND TO BE GIVEN UP AND THAT THE ICELANDIC INTEREST THEREFORE IS ONLY THAT OF EXTRACTING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE OUT OF THE U.S. AS A PRICE FOR ALLOWING THE BASE TO STAY; I.E. ICELAND IS ONLY ANOTHER MALTA, AND THE GOI BLUFF SHOULD BE CALLED IN A HARD-NOSED NO-NONSENSE MANNER.

2. AS WE SEE IT THERE ARE PROFOUND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ICELAND AND MALTA WHICH WOULD SEEM TO INVALIDATE SUCH A COMPARISON. TO START WITH, WHILE KEFLAVIK IS OF SOME

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ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE TO ICELAND, ITS OVERALL CONTRIBUTION

IS ONLY SOME 3 TO 4 PERCENT OF GNP, WHEREAS THE UK BASE IN MALTA PUMPS IN PERHAPS 30 PERCENT OF GNP, AND MALTA REALLY HAS NO OTHER MAJOR RESOURCE. ON THE MATTER OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES, THE MALTESE HAVE NO DEEP-HELD AVERSION TO FOREIGN BASES AS SUCH. THIS HAS AFTER ALL BEEN THEIR WAY OF LIFE FOR MANY GENERATIONS. TO THE ICELANDERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, FOREIGN BASES ARE A NEWLY-ARRIVED IRRITANT, A SORT OF NUISANCE TO BE PUT UP WITH, AND AT BEST A NECESSARY EVIL. FINALLY AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY IN TERMS OF DECISION-MAKING, THE UK WAS DEALING IN MALTA WITH A SHREWD AND STRONG MINTOFF, WHO MADE ALL DECISIONS SINGLE-HANDEDLY, AND WHO WAS OUT TO GET ALL HE COULD FOR WHAT HE WAS SELLING. IN ICELAND, WE ARE DEALING WITH A WEAK AND DIVIDED GOVERNMENT VIRTUALLY UNABLE TO MAKE ANY DECISION AT ALL ON THE BASE QUESTION, BUT WITH THE STRONGEST MEN IN THE GOVERNMENT DETERMINED TO GET RID OF IT IF POSSIBLE. WHAT WE WILL ULTIMATELY BE FACING IS A VOTE ON BASE RETENTION IN A RATHER CLOSELY DIVIDED PARLIAMENT, WITH ALL THE UNCERTAINTY INHERENT IN SUCH A POLITICAL SITUATION.

3. THE QUOTE ICELAND IS ONLY ANOTHER MALTA UNQUOTE LINE OF THOUGHT THEREFORE SEEMS TO US TO REFLECT A REAL MISREADING OF THE SITUATION, AND WE WOULD BE CONCERNED IF HMG ACTUALLY HOLDS THIS VIEW IN ANY SERIOUS WAY. WOULD BE HELPFUL IF EMBASSY COULD VENTILATE SUBJECT IN LOW-KEY MANNER WITH APPROPRIATE FCO OR OTHER OFFICIALS AND LET US KNOW HOW BRITISH THINKING SEEMS RUN. ROGERS

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